

Planting Azaleas, a Family Affair

Landscaping with Azaleas is an ideal project for parents and children because the spring flowering shrubs are so easy to plant. From choosing between their innumerable colors and sizes to planting and caring for them, growing Azaleas can be a family affair in which children help their parents beautify the garden.

Planning the Landscape: A Job for Mom and Dad

The diversity of Azaleas makes them suitable for almost every landscaping plan. For instance, dwarf varieties grow less than one foot tall and work well as a low-growing groundcover or in the nooks and crannies of a rock garden; larger types provide screening or hedging.

Combine year-round beauty with the sweet scents of summer by planting the eternally leafy evergreen Azaleas with the deciduous Mollis variety, which tends to be very fragrant when in bloom.

Given the endless array of colors for the funnel-shaped flowers, Azaleas can harmonize with surrounding plants, or function as dramatic accents. Although the typical palette is cool creams, whites, pinks, lavenders, violets, crimsons, and deep reds, some hybrids bloom in unusual hot yellow and orange.

There are also early-, mid- and late-season blooming hybrids, so planting a mix of species will provide a garden filled with flowers all season long.

When determining the planting site,

keep in mind that these shrubs should be protected from midday heat. So, do not plant them on the south or west side of the house unless the area is partially shaded. A canopy of trees also provides a nice setting for these woodland plants.

Family Planting:

A Project for Parent and Child

Planting Azaleas is child's play. Mix and match them in the landscape because all types like the same growing conditions. These acid-loving shrubs desire soil rich in organic matter, with good drainage, plenty of moisture, and a loose texture which allows air circulation and root growth.

Such soil is easy to create. On a tarp, let the child blend together three parts top



What's as much fun as playing in the dirt but far more beneficial? Conditioning the soil with Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss to ensure that the Azaleas will bring a lifetime of colorful blossoms and deep emerald leaves.

soil, two parts Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss, and one part garden sand or two-thirds garden soil and one-third Canadian Peat. Canadian Peat is the perfect soil amendment for Azaleas because it has a predictable pH level of 3.4 to 4.8, giving the shrubs the acidity they need to thrive, and it can retain up to 20 times its weight in water and oxygen.

Digging holes for these shallow-rooted plants is not a tiresome task either because the cavities should not be deeper than the rootballs are high. If the rootball is planted below ground level, the shrub will provide leaves but not flowers. Make the hole twice as wide as it is deep and gently break the earth around the rootball so roots can stretch out and grow.

Once the shrub is sitting straight in the hole, with the top of the rootball level to the ground, backfill with the amended soil and tamp firm. This is an ideal task for a child's small feet. Have the child stomp around and around the plant to form a receptacle for moisture at its base. Then water thoroughly with a hose to eliminate air pockets.

Apply a mulch to reduce moisture loss and weeds. Mulch also acts as an insulator for summer heat and winter frosts. To keep the acidity level high, make a mulch of one

part pine needles or compost and one part Canadian Sphagnum Peat. Let the child mix together the ingredients and spread them evenly around the plants.

Caring for the Shrubs:

A Task for Each Family Member

Children can be put in charge of certain aspects of the care and feeding of the new additions to the landscape, others are better handled by parents.

A child should water the plants regularly and thoroughly to encourage the formation of a healthy root system. Watering is especially important when the shrub is flowering and during the first year after it has been planted.

Azaleas produce more blooms when faded flowers are removed before they set to seed. This process, called "dead-heading," also stimulates new growth on young plants and can be done by young hands by simply pulling off the browning blossoms.

After blooming, mom or dad should give the shrubs a light shot of acid fertilizer, to insure plenty of color the next year.

Aside from an occasional application of fertilizer and a new layer of mulch in the fall, nothing more need be done to keep the Azaleas a family treasure of jewel-like blossoms and deep emerald leaves.

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